

## The Ideal Qualities and Tasks of Library Leaders: Perspectives of Academic, Public, School, and Special Library Administrators

By: [Anthony S. Chow](#) and Melissa Rich.

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### Abstract:

Our study examines the results of 114 interviews with academic, public, school media, and special library administrators collected over a one-year period in North Carolina. Preliminary results suggest that there is a core set of traits shared by administrators across libraries although some variation occurs depending on library environment. Implications center on the ability to inform degree preparation programs and practice by identifying primary qualities of library administration in general and specific to academic, public, school library, and special libraries.

**Keywords:** ideal qualities | tasks | traits

### Article:

\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below

## **The Ideal Qualities and Tasks of Library Leaders:**

### **Perspectives of Academic, Public, School, and Special Library Administrators**

Anthony S. Chow, Ph.D., and Melissa Rich, MLIS

#### **Abstract**

Our study examines the results of 114 interviews with academic, public, school media, and special library administrators collected over a one-year period in North Carolina. Preliminary results suggest that there is a core set of traits shared by administrators across libraries although some variation occurs depending on library environment. Implications center on the ability to inform degree preparation programs and practice by identifying primary qualities of library administration in general and specific to academic, public, school, and special libraries.

#### **Introduction**

Leaders play a pivotal part in the success or failure of their team, group, or organization. As the field of library and information studies continues to rapidly change it is essential to understand what the requirements of library leaders are today. Is there a common set of traits and characteristics for library administrators? Are there differences depending on the type of library and the patrons that they serve?

One of the study's authors has taught library leadership and management at the undergraduate and graduate university level for the past 12 years. The underlying question that served as the foundation for this study was the pervasive question of "is what is being taught in my graduate LIS course of significance and relevance to students who will be future practitioners in the field?" One of the best ways to answer this question was to ask current administrators in the field. The authors were interested in collecting and analyzing authentic knowledge derived directly from leaders in the field across different types of librarianship. The results of such an analysis could be used to inform how library leadership and management is taught in the classroom and applied in professional practice. Collectively, when analyzing the responses of library administrators along with previous studies reported in the literature, a picture can be painted of the ideal qualities required of library administrators; knowledge of these qualities can inform how well LIS programs prepare the future leaders of the field.

## Literature Review

Leaders are both made and born. In the groundbreaking research on leadership and management of 80,000 managers worldwide, the Gallup organization<sup>1</sup> found that leaders tend to look outward (they help establish the vision, establish relationships with outside people and organizations, represent the organization publicly, etc.) while managers tend to look inward (they help align work goals with the strengths of employees, develop and nurture employees, and help ensure employees have the resources necessary for their jobs, etc.). The research also found that leadership and management excellence could be measured by employee responses to 12 basic questions and that the likelihood that employees would respond positively to each question was governed by four master keys that leaders and managers possess: 1) Select for talent not simply experience, 2) Define the right outcomes not the right steps, 3) Focus on strengths not weaknesses, and 4) Find the right fit – not simply the next rung on the ladder.<sup>2</sup>

Emotional intelligence (EI) – the ability to control emotions and anticipate and react appropriately to other people's emotions<sup>3</sup> - has also recently been identified as a significant characteristic of outstanding leadership and management. Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to inspire and motivate people through their emotions and represent the practice of four core competencies: self-awareness (being aware of your emotions), self-management (managing your emotions), social awareness (empathy), and relationship management (handling relationships).<sup>3</sup> According to Victor Dulewicz and Malcolm Higgs, "the elements of EI are amongst some of the important attributes required for effective leaders," and that "the higher one rises within an organization, the more important EI becomes."<sup>4</sup> Further studies showed that EI traits could also be applied to effective teams.<sup>5</sup>

Applied emotional intelligence, "... boils down to your ability to control and anticipate and react to others emotional responses."<sup>6</sup> Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to inspire and motivate people through their emotions through the previously mentioned competencies. While these skills may appear to be soft skills and unbusiness-like, David Goleman found direct ties between emotional intelligence and business results.<sup>7</sup>

Debbie Schachter, the director at the Vancouver Public Library, encourages the application of emotional intelligence in libraries. She advocates that EI relates to the "... 'people' skills that librarians need to develop and use so that they can become leaders within their organizations."<sup>8</sup> She argues that emotional intelligence is essential in leadership development, particularly in establishing a rapport and improving feedback. Additionally, Hernon and Rossiter explored EI traits and found the most prized were self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation.<sup>9</sup> They conclude "it is important to

identify the assorted traits that comprise EI and to see that aspiring leaders in the library and other information fields cultivate the ones deemed most critical.”<sup>10</sup>

One important concept within emotional intelligence is resonant leadership. Resonant leaders result from the successful application of the EI competencies. Libraries fall into dissonance and become unhealthy organizations due to a variety of factors including self-sacrifice (when leaders give too much and do not take time for self-renewal), defensive routines (when they lay blame on others), and unhealthy conditions in the organization (when employees are afraid to speak up due to fear of reprisal).<sup>11</sup> Alire identifies three ideas to help renew dissonant libraries and create resonant leaders. Mindfulness is an important tool for resonant leaders so they know who they are, how others perceive them, and what they can do to stop dissonance.<sup>11</sup> Hope and compassion are important aspects of resonant leadership; they breed inspiration and show employees that they care about their employees.<sup>11</sup>

A second leadership model applied to libraries is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders “can move followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the group or organization.”<sup>12</sup> They work to inspire change. Transformative leadership has five components: idealized influence (or the leader’s charismatic actions); attributive charisma (leaders being seen as confident and powerful); inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (challenging his or her followers); and individualized consideration (supporting the follower’s needs).<sup>13</sup> A transformational leader incorporates EI traits as well. “A transformational leader uses many EI traits by inspiring followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes, and mentoring and coaching followers to develop their own leadership capabilities.”<sup>14</sup>

Another type of leadership is transactional leadership. Transactional leadership falls in the line of the carrot and stick approach to management where leaders provide incentives for their employees to meet goals.<sup>15</sup> Transformational leadership rises above this. Albritton conducted a study exploring transformational leadership in academic libraries. She explored the perceptions of transformational and transactional leadership in academic libraries and their association with satisfaction and effectiveness of the leader.<sup>15</sup> The study found that transformational leadership has a positive effect on leaders and aspects of it enhance performance and improve the organization.

A third model of leadership is facilitative leadership. A facilitative leader “involves followers as much as possible in creating the group’s vision and purpose, carrying out the vision and purpose, and building a productive and cohesive team. Facilitation can be seen as a leadership approach.”<sup>16</sup> This approach, advocated by Schwartz, has four core values: valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment, and compassion.<sup>17</sup> These core values are cyclical, meaning one seeks and shares valid information, uses that information to make an informed decision, and commits to that

decision while continuing to seek valid information.<sup>18</sup> Compassion involves being able to temporarily suspend one point of view to understand another.

Thomas Moore, the director of the Wake County Public Library System, encourages the use of facilitative leadership at public libraries. The Wake County Library has utilized this management style successfully for over eight years. According to Moore, it “has helped the staff of the Wake County Library System reach better decisions, learn from their mistakes, and engage in more meaningful conversations than before.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, when they brought on a new hire, some involved in the decision had doubts, but did not share them; after the new hire left, they voiced their doubts and found others had similar doubts.<sup>20</sup> If everyone had shared their concerns through facilitative leadership, the hiring board may have considered a different hire.

The question of what it takes to be an effective leader and manager in a library setting has also been explored by ALA. In 2007, five members of the ALA’s Emerging Leaders Program created a leadership competency model with five mega-competencies and seventeen broad competencies. The five mega-competencies identified were: 1) cognitive ability, 2) vision, 3) interpersonal effectiveness, 4) managerial effectiveness, and 5) personal attributes.<sup>21</sup> According to Ammons-Stephens et al. (2009), these competencies should serve as the foundation to evaluate leadership skills in libraries.

Prior to the creation of these competencies, Schachter had already identified leadership skills needed by librarians. In “Leadership Skills for Library Managers,” she states that communication and vision, modeling behaviors (being a role model), developing others (allowing staff to engage in professional development), responsibility, and creating results are the basic but important skills of effective leaders.<sup>22</sup> Many of these skills fall into the competencies, like communication and vision, responsibility (humility), developing others and modeling behaviors (accountability), identified a few years later by the five emerging leaders.<sup>23</sup>

Hernon, Powell, and Young examined attributes of academic and public library directors in their book *The New Library Leadership*. They conducted this study in response to a perceived shortage of incoming library leaders to help future librarians identify and hone their leadership skills. The authors used results from prior research to identify qualities for ARL leaders and presented these competencies to representatives for comment.<sup>24</sup> For ACRL and large to medium public libraries, they employed a Delphi survey where representatives ranked a list of attributes, then organized them, and asked other directors to comment upon the attributes.<sup>25</sup> Results from the study showed similarities in qualities for ARL and ACRL libraries and identified “Knowledge Area”, “Professional Presence”, “Productive Work Environment”, “Personal Characteristics”, and “Leadership” as the strongest categories of leadership qualities in the combined list

(academic and public).<sup>26</sup> One drawback is the lists are long (a criticism frequently cited by library commentators) and rather unwieldy when applying them to library leaders.<sup>27</sup>

Library literature is peppered with articles discussing the results of good leadership (i.e. what good leaders do) and offering pointers for leaders and managers. The ALSC Managing Children's Services Committee offers advice for first time managers in their article "Jumping in Feet First." They stress presenting yourself, acknowledging your predecessor, learning the politics of place, handling issues, coaching staff, and learning to delegate.<sup>28</sup> Much of the advice offered by the committee involves the creation of leadership competencies like development, communication, and vision. Beecher offers practical advice for middle school librarians in "Managing a Middle School Library." This advice includes developing leadership competencies like communication skills and creativity /innovation (when developing catchy signs and ways to get students into the library). Schachter also advises change, both managing and seeking, when stepping up to leadership roles.<sup>29</sup> Anderson identifies what leaders are doing in school library media centers. Among the many things that SML leaders engage in, a few examples are professional development, being responsible, credible, and professional, and on a mission to improve student achievement (their vision).<sup>30</sup> These leaders exhibit the application of the library leadership competencies.

The literature review reveals that a surprisingly small amount, however, has been written about leadership and management in libraries, particularly compared to other professions. Some authors acknowledged this shortage within their works.<sup>1031</sup> ALA's Library Leadership, Administration, and Management Association (LLAMA) task force even cited the lack of library literacy discussing leadership competencies as a reason for the project. Additionally, much of the literature focuses on the results of effective leadership and management, not necessarily the practices behind it. Furthermore, the literature applies leadership and management in academic library settings; little exists for public libraries and even less exists for school media and special libraries.

Many of the studies used leadership models, like transformational leadership and etc., to define leadership and management in libraries. Others, like the LLAMA task force, defined broad competencies and qualities needed to be an effective leader. Our study seeks to step out of prior leadership models and research. It seeks to define effective practices of leadership and management across all libraries. The practices are visible through the primary tasks of each administrator. The study also highlights the ideal characteristics as identified by administrators in the field. The three research questions our study seeks to answer are:

1. What are the ideal qualities a library administrator should have?
2. What are the primary tasks of library administrators?
3. Do these qualities and tasks differ for administrators across types of libraries?

## Methodology

A total of 114 administrator interviews were conducted and analyzed for this study. One hundred and nine of them were conducted as part of an assignment for a core leadership and management LIS course. The results were stratified into four types of library: academic, public, school media, and special. Parallel to the analysis of existing interview reports we decided to conduct additional interviews in order to supplement our findings and triangulate the data.

### Participants

Administrator interviews were conducted over a one-year period by graduate students as a course assignment in the program's core library administration and management course. For this assignment, students interviewed a current library administrator or administrator in the information services field (e.g. database company, etc.) to discuss leadership and management within his or her organization. Each student paper answered followed the same outline format consisting of twelve questions ranging from primary tasks, definitions of leadership and management, to ideal characteristics of administrators (See Appendix A). Administrators were from a total of 109 libraries: academic (n=36), public (n=32), school media (n=23), and special (n=18).

Additional interviews were conducted with administrators in academic, public, school, and special libraries. Two academic interviews enabled us to see leadership and management on both an institutional (library) and departmental scale. These interviews served as a validity check to compare and contrast with our preliminary findings. The administrators were asked similar questions to those in the student papers.

### Analysis Protocol

Prior to analysis, all identifying information was removed from each student paper to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The papers were divided based upon the type of library and we utilized qualitative factor analysis to uncover common themes within the papers. Using this process, the specifics of the interviews were generalized into common themes. So a response of "ability to articulate ideas" would be categorized under the theme "communication". The responses were then coded for common themes by both color and number. Recurring themes that were similar were then collapsed and tabulated for the frequency of occurrence.

## Results

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## The Ideal Qualities of Library Administrators

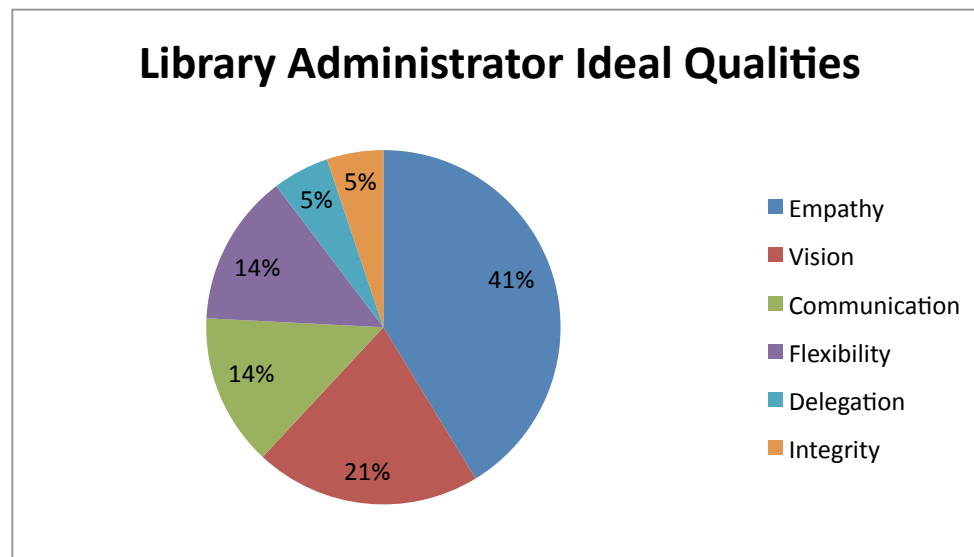
The results of both the content analysis and administrator interviews suggest commonalities and differences in the ideal qualities identified by library administrators across different libraries.

Empathy was the most consistently cited quality mentioned by all participants in all libraries. Vision was mentioned as a major factor by three of the four types of libraries. See Table 1 below.

**Table 1 - Ideal Qualities of Library Administrators**

<b>Academic</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>School Library</b>	<b>Special Library</b>
Empathy (n=13)	Empathy (n=13)	Empathy (n=9)	Empathy (n=5)
Vision (n=9)	Vision (n=7)	Flexibility (n=8)	Integrity (n=5)
Communication (n=8)	Flexibility (n=5)		Communication (n=5)
	Delegation (n=5)		Vision (n=4)

In the aggregate, across all factors mentioned more than once in the library administrator interviews, empathy was mentioned the most frequently (42%, n=40) followed by vision (21%, n=20), flexibility (14%, n=13), and communication (14%, n=13). The ability to delegate (5%, n=5) and the need to have integrity (5%, n=5) were also mentioned multiple times.



**Figure 1 - Library Administrator Ideal Qualities**



Analysis of the themes that emerged suggests that there are four major factors identified by library administrators as ideal qualities across different types of libraries: empathy, vision, communication, and flexibility.

**Empathy** was defined by the administrators in general as a quality that emphasizes compassion with a focus on people, openness to change and flexibility “because employees have lives and interests outside of work,” and a need to recognize and be attuned to the humaneness of people that allows one to hear both their words and body language. This includes “the ability to balance head and heart,” a focus on maintaining a positive environment, and helping people reach their potential as professionals within the organization and operating as a “people person” with a “kind heart.” Empathy towards patrons means being sensitive to the needs of the community and showing respect for all people regardless of socioeconomic status. One public administrator associated empathy with patrons as a skill that allowed them to “hear the questions that the patrons aren’t asking.” A school librarian stated that one must “realize you attract more flies with honey than with vinegar;” keeping an open door to school staff, parents, and administration helps build a sense of community. Library leaders must be able to work with all kinds of people and reflect a “helpful and outgoing personality.” This ability to consider the thoughts and inputs of others has a calming effect that allows them to set a positive direction and balance compassion and firmness. A good sense of humor is also a must.

**Vision** is a quality administrators felt involves having a clear idea of what one wants to accomplish within the context of the bigger picture and the library’s mission and overall vision of the organization while also being attuned to the “here-and-now” issues necessary to get there. This enables leaders to clearly articulate their vision that helps “set the tone” for the entire organization and find balance between the overall broad direction of their organization and the detailed daily goals that must come together for overall success to be achieved. Library leaders with good vision must think globally, consider several steps ahead when making plans, be a good thinker, and be able to produce ideas and vision that resonate with others through his or her passion for the work.

**Communication** means listening to and reflecting on others’ desires when deciding on what steps should be taken next. Library leaders must communicate ideas that make sense and inspire others while at the same time being extremely efficient and effective in how they communicate. They must also be willing to listen and network with others, maintain open lines of communication, and have strong presentation, writing, and listening skills. As one administrator put it, “good communication skills help administrators realize the full potential of the staff.” They also must maintain a good rapport with those that work in the library tangentially and consistently network with employees, colleagues, and other institutions.

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**Flexibility** means being open to change, not too rigid, and remaining versatile to being able to change with the times. Library leaders need to “commit to life-long learning” and make sure to stay current with existing and new trends in the field so that they can maintain and foster curiosity in the field. They are approachable, committed to their “customers”, and prepared to do something completely different than what was planned with an emphasis on accommodating patrons with flexibility and humility so that they never “get stuck in one place.”

Four additional factors that emerged within one or more of the library areas included delegation, creativity, integrity, and passion.

**Delegation** involves the ability to recognize different areas of responsibility, organize a project, and delegate appropriately, recognizing that others may have the best ideas. It also means being a cheerleader, enthusiastic, and comfortable in his/her role so that one is not threatened by letting everyone else in the organization use their talents. Library leaders that effectively delegate must express their passion and invite others to get excited and come along so that employees take the initiative, demonstrates their own enthusiasm, and have a thick enough skin to handle “coachable moments” without being offended or taking it too personally. They also need to know when to “get out of the way,” which means giving employees solid support but also not necessarily doing everything they ask.

**Creativity** involves the ability to anticipate instead of react, to think on her/his feet while always keeping the big picture in mind helping to ensure that the company still maintains its direction and stays on track, and not being afraid to do what is best for your patron. Library leaders who are creative are not afraid to ask the patron what they think and are able to rearrange employees and funds to find the most successful and effective way to run the organization. They are open to trying new things, have a desire to continue learning, are assertive but not aggressive, are creative problem solvers, recognize that others may have the best ideas, take risks, prioritize, and are honest.

**Integrity** is a quality that embodies honesty, respect, humility, fairness applied with patience, and the ability to understand that it is actually paradoxically best when everyone does not necessarily agree with each other. It also involves the ability to mediate internal conflicts by being fair and objective and respectful while maintaining open lines of communication, being humble, and reliable in addressing issues. Library leaders with integrity exemplify personal integrity, forthrightness, politeness, honesty, caring, and humaneness; they do not micro-manage, always realize that they are a part of a growing organization that is not perfect, and often remind themselves that they are not omniscient.

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**Passion** involves enthusiasm for the organization, the ability to listen to people, and care about the job through the passion generated through what [they] want to accomplish. This involves a single-minded commitment to and for libraries, strength, and a level of comfort in their role so they are not threatened by letting everyone else in the organization use their talents, express their dedication, and come along in their own, unique ways. Library leaders show passion through organizational focus and commitment, perseverance, and that the mission of libraries is relevant every day.

The ideal qualities identified by academic library administrators in the qualitative factor analysis aligned perfectly with the qualities identified by other types of libraries: empathy (n=13), vision (n=9), and communication skills (n=8). Delegation and creativity also were identified multiple times (n=2). Interviews with two additional administrators substantiated the importance of these qualities. Our first interviewee identified being a visionary, communicating this vision, and liking people as ideal qualities necessary to lead an academic library. Our second academic administrator added the need to support staff and working to make them happy. Both administrator interviews suggest empathy is a key factor.

For public library administrators the ideal qualities were again empathy (n=13) and vision (n=7) followed by flexibility (n=5), the ability to delegate (n=5), and creativity (n=2). The public library administrator interviewed stressed the importance of empathy and being active within the community. He emphasized that public library leaders must be approachable so members of the community feel comfortable enough to approach him. He also pointed out that this quality should not be limited to library leaders; everyone in the library should have these qualities.

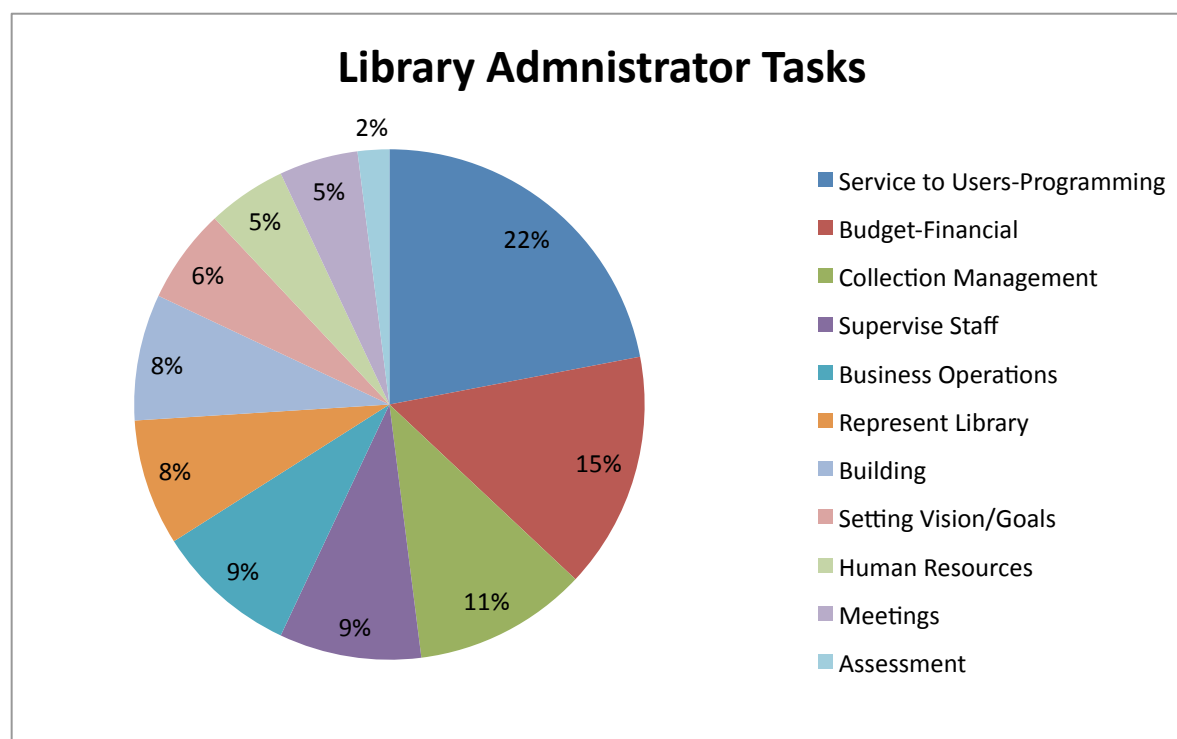
School librarians identified qualities centered on empathy (n=9) and flexibility (n=8). A few additional factors were mentioned multiple times - vision, creativity, integrity, and delegation. In many school libraries, the librarian is the only professional working so she/he does not have anyone to whom to delegate. Our school librarian emphasized the importance of advocacy and being a team player and the need to build relationships; through these relationships, others learn what the librarian actually does.

Special library administrators again valued empathy (n=5) along with personal integrity (n=5), communication skills (n=5), and vision (n=4). Flexibility, passion, and creativity were also identified (n=1). While the papers did not emphasize flexibility and creativity in special libraries, the administrator interviewed did. She also stressed having a visionary quality, emphasizing the need to see the big picture for the institution and fitting the library into that picture. One reason why some of these traits are emphasized more strongly than others is the variety of special libraries. Papers in the analysis, for example, used information from interviews with art librarians, medical librarians, and special collections librarians. The administrator interviewed illustrates that, though

these qualities are specific to each special library, some traits, like having vision, are applicable to all.

### Typical Tasks Performed by Library Administrators

Across all libraries the primary task identified most frequently was service to users (22%, n=59) followed by dealing with the budget (15%, n=39) and collection management (11%, n=30). See Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2 - Primary Library Administrator Tasks**

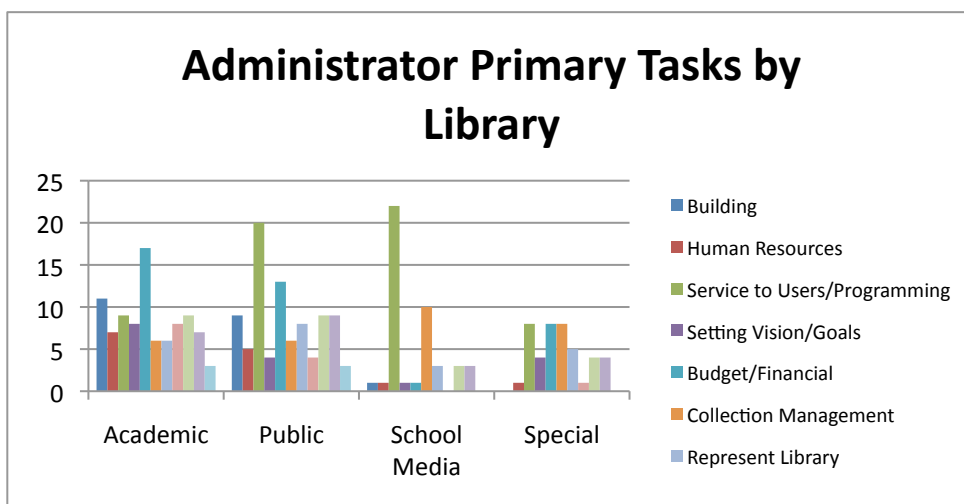
**Service to users** was described as a core value emphasizing a constant focus on people involving both patrons and staff. This was operationalized in many different ways – direct instruction, communicating the value and vision of the library to constituencies outside of the library, helping with day-to-day service to patrons, programming, planning and providing the materials and services patrons want, and putting out “fires” before they grew out of control. As one administrator described it, “The most important role she plays as library director is as a servant of the people. She realizes *that* is the most important part of the job and it is not about her; it is about the people that come into the library to use the services it provides. And she is always trying to find new ways to best serve the community.” Another facet of service to users is answering patron concerns and ensuring that existing services and programming are of high quality and appropriate which involves needs assessment, constant interaction with

the community, and research on innovation and best practices. Providing technology support, assistance, and advice is also an emerging role. School librarians also have to work collaboratively with teachers to plan lessons and ensure that the proper technology and resources are available.

**Budgeting** is a task involving “balancing expenses and needs for the year” and often the administrator is the sole purchaser of “everything for the library.” Budget related activities include overseeing and planning an operational budget, grant writing and the constant pursuit of additional resources, management and allocation of these resources, prioritizing, and planning budgeting or spending policies, and report writing.

**Collection management** is the process of managing and ensuring a relevant and high quality physical and online collection. Common duties include weeding, developing a process and appropriate policies for managing the collection and reserves, working with staff and patrons to help analyze and evaluate to determine what needs to “stay” and what needs to “go”, and constant analysis to ensure selection and maintenance is aligned to the goals of the organization and patrons the library serves. An additional responsibility is effectively describing the collection to patrons.

The primary tasks of library administrators differed slightly by type of library. Academic libraries’ top three tasks are dealing with the budget, the building, and then a connection between service to users and supervision of staff. See figure below.



**Figure 3 - Administrator Primary Tasks by Type of Library**

Administrators in academic libraries perform a variety of tasks in their role as leaders within the library (n=11). The primary task identified was budgeting (n=17) followed by building issues (n=11), service to users (n=9), supervising staff (n=9), meetings (n=8), and providing a vision (n=8). The variety of primary tasks illustrates the variety of roles administrators must take on in leading a library. See Table 2.

**Table 2 - Library Administrator Tasks by Type of Library**

Task	Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
Service to users/Programming	9	19	22	7	57
Budget/Financial	17	13	1	6	37
Collection Management	6	6	10	7	29
Supervise Staff	9	9	3	3	24
Business Operations	7	8	3	4	22
Building	11	9	1	0	21
Represent Library	6	7	3	3	19
Setting Vision/Goals	8	4	1	3	16
Human Resources	7	5	1	1	14
Meetings	8	4	0	1	13
Assessment	3	3	0	0	6

**Building issues** involve general maintenance, custodial and cleaning services, furniture and facilities repair and purchasing, planning and implementation of library hours, “Set(ing) priorities for on-going renovation of library facilities,” and physical issues impacting patrons such as lighting, safety, temperature, and comfort.

**Supervising staff** involves allocating people to appropriate roles and responsibilities, committees and special projects, day-to-day supervision, and coordinating people and roles ensuring effectiveness, goodness of fit, and appropriateness.

**Meetings** involve communication in a wide variety of ways. This involves “ensuring that information about her department is conveyed to other library departments” and that “...department heads have the resources they need to succeed.” Formal meetings involve an agenda and the taking of minutes as well as the coordination of special projects and assignments. Informal meetings also involve frequent discussions around how “to ensure smooth running of the facility” and often mean one-on-one meetings with staff.

**Providing a vision** means planning for the future and the ability to articulate that future in a way that is clear and inspiring so that “...long-term goals for library improvement” can be both identified and worked towards. As one academic administrator stated, the “...main tasks as the leader of the library involve understanding the needs of employees, faculty, and students, and incorporating those needs into a creative future vision for the library.” Performing such a task helps guide and “lead library strategic planning and assessment.”

Public library administrators also perform a variety of tasks in their work. From the content analysis, these administrators identified service to their users as their primary

task (n=19), followed by budget (n=13), building issues (n=9), supervising staff (n=8), and business operations (n=8). It is telling that public library administrators place service to users in such importance; it the general mission of public libraries to serve their users. Our public library administrator's primary tasks echo some of the primary tasks identified by the analysis, particularly those related to the budget/financials (including securing funding), representing the library, and setting the vision. One task of his not identified in the analysis is making sure the right people are in the right positions, meaning assigning tasks and positions based upon staff's strengths and interests. Our administrator delegates these tasks allowing him to focus upon other aspects of his work, like representing the library to the community.

**Business operations** in public libraries involve "ensuring a successful overall operation of the library," which includes "checking the schedule/staff availability" and other administrative tasks that address "...any issues or problems that arise." Leading business operations also involve, "monthly reports, returning calls, scheduling, time approvals for pay, and annual reviews" and creating or refining necessary policies and procedures; another administrator defined oversight of business operations as an extremely diverse activity that includes, "To promote customer service; communicate, direct and enforce library staff initiatives, policies and procedures; recruit, develop, coach and reward staff; oversee branch schedules and defined procedures; collaborate with staff and managers in all service areas; represent the library at community events; and much more"

According to the analysis, school librarians engage in primarily two tasks - service to users (n=22) and developing their collection (n=10). This suggests that many of the tasks required by other libraries are handled elsewhere in their schools. It allows them to truly focus on their users and provide resources needed for their users. These tasks parallel our school library interviewee. She focuses on the collection, keeping a clean space, and collaborating with faculty/teachers.

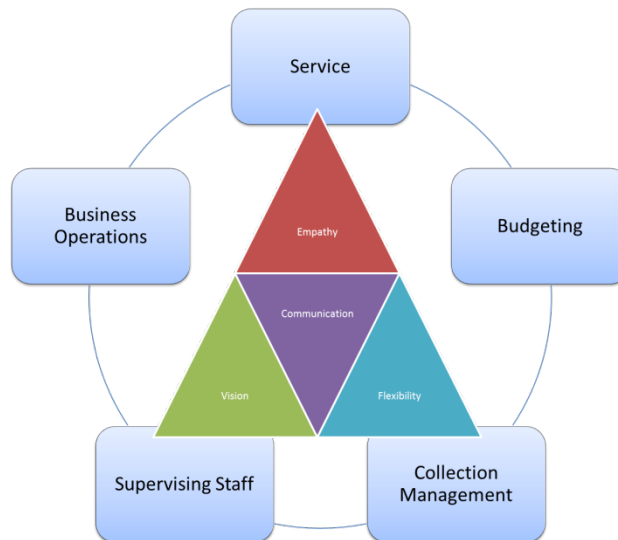
Special library administrators primarily provide service to users (n=7), conduct collection management (n=7), and work on the budget (n=6). Building issues, human resources, attending meetings, and assessment were also mentioned. These tasks may be delegated to others within the organization, like human resources and building maintenance. Furthermore, many special libraries only have a single librarian so the need for meetings is fairly low. While our administrator's primary tasks are specific to her library, they do mirror the dominant tasks identified in the analysis. She works with the collection making it accessible to all of her users by assisting other departments to develop programming and exhibitions. She does handle a budget and purchases resources needed for her users. In addition, she supervises volunteers and interns working in the library. One task not identified in the analysis is staying on top of what



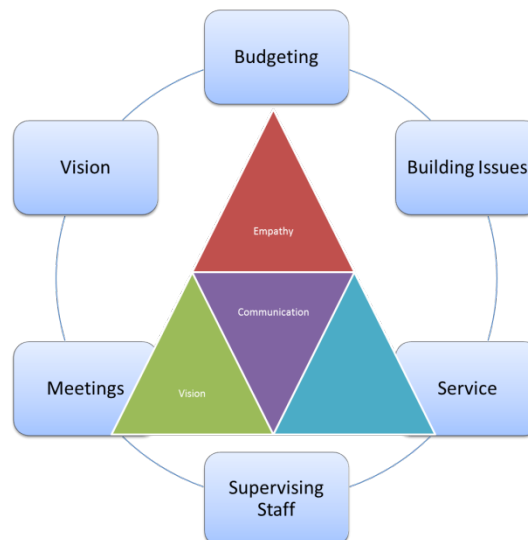
the institution is doing and working to keep the library relevant. This visionary aspect of her work allows her to plan for the future.

### Library leader models by type of library

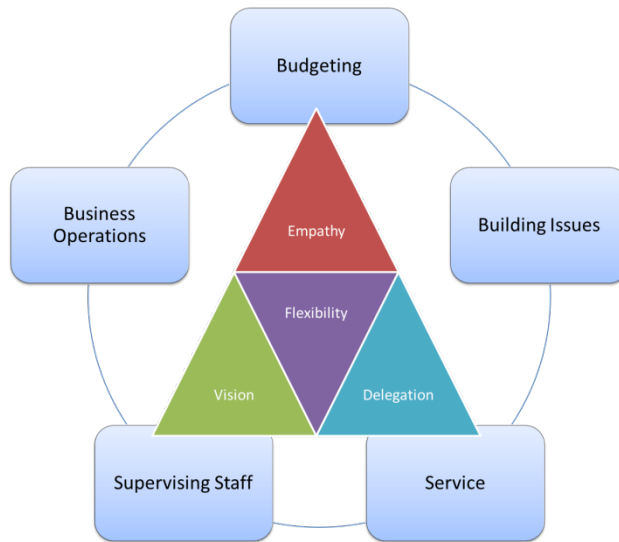
Combining the identified ideal qualities and tasks of library leaders both in general and specific types of libraries allows us to project models for each:



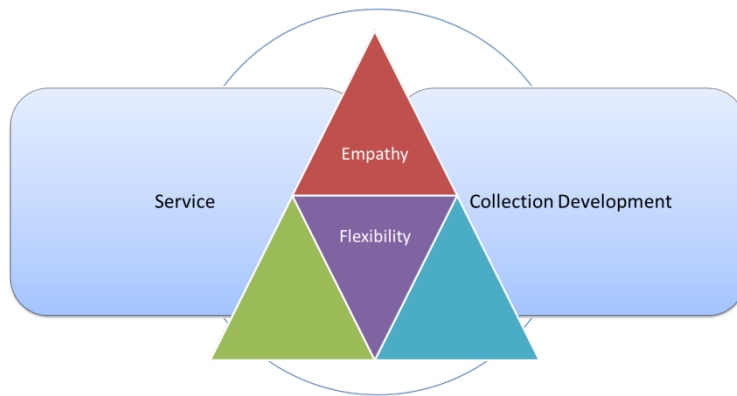
**Figure 4 - General Library Administrator Qualities and Primary Tasks**



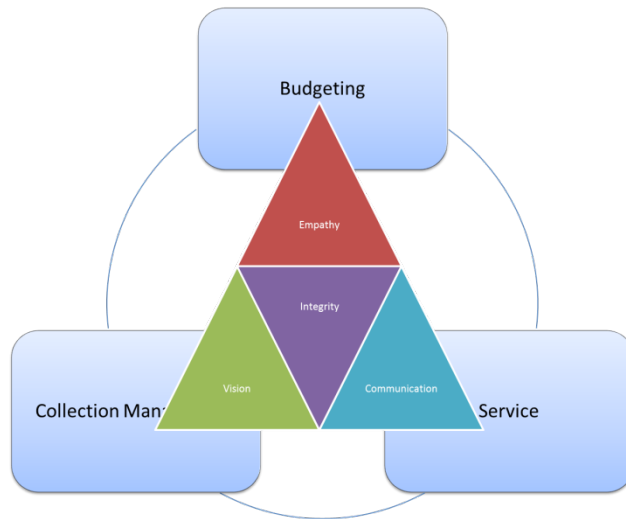
**Figure 5 - Academic Library Administrator Qualities and Primary Tasks**



**Figure 6 - Public Library Administrator Qualities and Primary Tasks**



**Figure 7 - School Library Administrator Qualities and Primary Tasks**



**Figure 8 - Special Library Administrator Qualities and Primary Tasks**

## Discussion

The results show that leadership and management vary over the different types of libraries. Despite this, some primary attributes of leadership and management are consistent throughout all libraries; illustrating that, while its application varies across disciplines, the core, foundational concepts and attributes of quality leadership and management remain the same across different types of libraries.

### Ideal Qualities

All administrators were asked to identify “ideal qualities” for a library administrator. Two qualities, empathy and vision, were cited across all libraries. Empathy was clearly the strongest factor identified as prevalent by administrators across libraries. Vision is a recognized leadership trait; many widely acknowledge that leaders set the vision for organizations. The strength of each factor supports Buckingham and Coffman’s (1999) research findings that suggest leaders help move people and organizations forward.<sup>32</sup> Empathy is used to understand the needs of employees, customers, and organizations and vision helps coalesce competing ideas into one, mutually acceptable vision articulated in terms that are easy to understand and centered on the needs of others. Empathy and vision are also consistent with Hernon and Rossiter’s (2006) concept of transformational leadership.<sup>33</sup> Empathy speaks to the transformational leadership components of attributive charisma and individualized consideration while vision speaks to idealized influence and inspirational motivation components.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of emotional intelligence also supports our findings and helps inform the use of empathy and vision as a ubiquitous philosophical framework. Empathy falls into Goleman's social awareness competency, in which leaders are aware of others' emotions. They then use this awareness to work with and guide employees toward clearly articulated and common goals. Empathy in libraries has two applications. Administrators apply the principles of empathy just as Goleman stated, using it to inspire and influence their employees. They also apply empathy to their users. Library anxiety and bringing non-users into the library are problems frequently cited by professionals in the field.<sup>35</sup> It could be suggested that library administrators may use empathy as a cornerstone to help establish resonance amongst employees, patrons, and library goals, which helps create a welcoming, positive environment. Effective administrators are able to dispel the idea of the library as an uninviting place and connect with potential users to bring them into the library.

While the qualities of empathy and vision are consistent throughout all types of libraries, the peripheral qualities fluctuate. These other qualities relate more to the application of leadership within the particular library. They show that the core qualities of library administrators are the same throughout all the types of libraries. The peripheral qualities, like communication, flexibility, etc., while useful for all administrators, are more specific to the type of library. For instance, the ability to communicate with complex and highly educated college and university constituencies is of paramount importance to academic library administrators. Public library administrators have to be flexible given the wide array of patrons they serve and learn to delegate given the diverse set of services they provide; most importantly, delegation allows administrators to assign and employees to share tasks that speak to their unique strengths. School librarians typically work alone in an educational environment that often does not clearly understand what a librarian's role is in the school and therefore the ability to empathize with the needs of administration, teachers, students, and parents is critical.<sup>36</sup> In addition, given the divergent demands and expectations of different groups, school librarians must be flexible.

### Application of Leadership and Management across Libraries

The primary tasks of administrators in the content analysis best illustrate the application of leadership and management across all types of libraries. One primary task that all administrators share (academic, public, school media, and special) is service to users.

Despite this commonality, the degree of the administrators' involvement in service to users varies. Public library and especially school media library administrators are heavily involved in work to serve their users. All of the primary tasks in school libraries are in service to users, e.g. developing the collection to support them, etc. Even special library administrators demonstrate strong user-oriented services. While service may not

appear to be as strong as it is in public and school libraries, special libraries also develop collections to support their user base's needs. For instance, a fine arts museum library collects art-related materials to aid with exhibitions and education programs at their institution.

Another factor influencing the primary tasks of administrators is the size of the library. Large libraries have a hierarchical organization within them; they are usually divided into departments that oversee a particular function of the library, like access services or reference and instruction. These departments focus more on serving the user base, allowing upper-level administrators to focus on other tasks to ensure the smooth functioning of the library. This includes maintaining the building, supervising and meeting with staff to remain engaged in the functioning of the library, and maintaining the budget. Public and academic library administrators perform a variety of tasks out of necessity unique to them because they tend to oversee stand-alone buildings and operations. They are responsible for the smooth functioning of the library, such as dealing with building issues, etc. These responsibilities are held elsewhere in school and special libraries since they are housed within a host institution.

The primary tasks also reflect the nature of the host institution. For instance, academic, public, and special librarians manage budgets and engage in fundraising for their libraries. This shows that their respective institutions (university, museum, county governments, etc.) delegated this task to them. This is both a blessing and a curse.

These primary tasks illustrate how leadership and management vary over the different types of libraries. It shows that some institutions place priority on some tasks over others. They also illustrate that the size of the library influences how leadership and management is applied, e.g. upper level administrators at large libraries work to ensure the overall smooth functioning of the library while smaller ones can focus on a particular task, like service to users.

Primary tasks identified in the content analysis speak to what some of the typical tasks are for library administrators across all types of libraries. Academic library leaders typically focus on the functioning of the library as a whole; they work to ensure that staff has the resources he or she needs, make sure the building meets their needs, and meet with staff to stay engaged in the library. Public library leaders focus more outward, onto the community, their user base. They do perform the usual tasks to maintain the smooth functioning of the library, but they focus more upon their users, providing the service to support them and resources to meet their information needs. Special librarians also focus on serving their users, through services (like reference) and collections, but must also be able to manage a budget.

Our content analysis identified types of tasks that are specific to type of library; our interviews provided us an opportunity to discuss and vet with library leaders what they think and typical tasks they do. The practices identified through the interviews apply to types of libraries. According to our additional interviews, advocacy and outreach are important practices for library leaders. Leaders need to engage with their users to divine what they will need and work to draw them into the library. They must also advocate for their users and provide the resources they need to support research, etc. Responses about primary tasks for library managers varied from interviewee to interviewee. On the whole, they focused on managers engaging in the day-to-day work. One commonality among them all is knowing your employees/volunteers/interns' strengths and delegating tasks aligned with those strengths.

### **Limitations and Implications**

There are three primary limitations of our study. First, although an assignment outline was provided, how students collected data, asked questions, and answered them in their respective final papers differed, which significantly impacts the overall internal and external validity of our findings. Second, the library administrators were only from North Carolina, which again limits the overall ability to generalize and the external validity of the findings. Third, the study has a low sample size with only 114 overall respondents. We need a much larger, national sample to see if our preliminary factors identified remain consistent.

Implications of the study focus on the development of initial models for identifying ideal qualities and primary tasks of library administrators in general and also specific to each type of library. While the findings will likely be refined as we increase the sample size of participants, having these models as initial starting part can be useful for researchers, practitioners, and educators alike. The most important implication, however, is in student preparation where faculty who are teaching courses in LIS can utilize our initial findings as a checklist to compare and contrast existing curricula to ensure both the qualities and tasks are being addressed. Having a preliminary model for library leadership can serve as a foundation for students to scaffold their learning in a more concrete context when discussing and trying to understand how and why the concepts of leadership and management and all of their associated skills (such as marketing, advocacy, budgeting, personnel and asset management, etc.) are important to their future careers.

### **Conclusion**

Students frequently remark how they initially believed the primary job of leaders and managers was to take charge, be firm and uncompromising (for the fear of appearing weak and unsure of oneself), and rule with an iron fist. The research literature,

however, has started to suggest that the best leaders and managers are actually in fact centered on the needs of employees and their customers/patrons. Our findings add to this body of research as we have found that while leadership and management slightly vary across types of libraries, empathy and vision, both soft skills, are the major qualities required of library administrators. The primary tasks of library administrators center on taking care of service and programming for patrons along with paying attention to the budget and managing the collection. Using these results, we hope to articulate a preliminary model that will help inform both current practitioners, as well as a new generation of library leaders who will need to have a wide variety of skills in order to address the rapidly changing needs of the community and the libraries of the future that will serve them.

Future research will include examining library administrator best practices and identifying primary areas of improvement administrators would like to see changed. In addition, we will continue to expand the sample size of our study so that we can increase the internal and external validity and overall generalization of our findings.

## **Appendix A**

### **Library Administrator Interview Assignment**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. Describe your research method
- B. Describe the administrator you interviewed and the organization they are leading
- C. What are their organizational goals, how are they organized (departments, functions, etc.), and who are the stakeholders they are serving?

#### **II. Administrator Tasks**

- A. Describe what his/her primary tasks are
- B. Explain the 1/3rd rule to them – how well does this fit within their leadership rubric and what they do on a day-to-day basis?
- C. Ask him/her, if possible, to breakdown into percentages what they do.
- D. What are his/her definitions of leadership and management?

#### **III. Answers to Your Top Five Questions**

- A. Ask your administrator their opinion of your top 5 questions
- B. Ask them any other context specific questions not answered:
  - a. What does it take to run your (academic, public, school) library?



- b. What are the most frequently occurring problems she/he has to deal with (i.e. personnel, weeding the collection, budget, disagreeable patrons, etc.)?
- c. Any advice for me? (etc.)

#### **IV. Opportunities for improvement**

- A. How satisfied is he/she that his/her organizational goals are being met? What are some of their “opportunities for improvement?”
- B. In his/her opinion, what are the “ideal” qualities an administrator should have?
- C. What are some lessons he/she would like to pass on to you?

#### **V. Compare and Contrast our readings to your administrator**

- A. How do the three secrets of Raving Fans apply, if at all, to your administrator and his/her library? Do you see a way for one or all the secrets to apply in your administrator’s current library?
- B. Talk about the 12 questions or how they relate to your administrator and his/her library.
- C. How about emotional intelligence and your administrator?

#### **VI. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- A. Summarize what you have learned about the administrator interviewed and how this has informed your perspective on what it takes to run a library or organization. Try to integrate what you have learned with your own leadership schematic based on the course readings and lectures as well as your own experience.
- B. In your opinion, what are some the strengths and opportunities for improvement for your administrator and his/her library or organization?

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## Endnotes

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